

THE SCIENCE FICTION OF GENDER
IN H.G. WELLS' *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU*

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2010

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To my mother, who is no longer here, and to Pattye, who supports me in all that I do

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the help I have received on this thesis from both of my committee members. I especially want to thank Pamela K. Gilbert, for her kind support, throughout this project. I am also indebted to her critiques that pushed me in the direction that this thesis has taken. I would also like to thank Phillip Wegner for his contributions to making my writing clearer and stronger as well as his suggestions for further study and inquiry into SF.

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August 2010

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Although *The Island of Doctor Moreau* can be read as advancing charges of feminine animality and women's unrestrained sexuality, or that animals and women share a closer connection than do men to either, these interpretations fail to incorporate an understanding of science fiction and the historical context of the "woman question." This analysis of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* argues for a reading as science fiction, as reflecting contemporary popular science, and as commentary on the New Women of 1890s England.

Wells' story installs the feminine as a force disrupting the seemingly controlled laboratory island of Dr. Moreau. It also participates in the feminizing of the scientific object, and expresses men's fear of the havoc that would be unleashed by an enfranchised New Woman. By understanding the relationship between the New Woman and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, we can better see English men's anxieties manifesting in contemporary popular science of Wells' story and the anti-women's rights movement.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: A HISTORY AND FRAMEWORK

One of the important series of debates occurring in Britain during the late 19th century concerned “the women question.” The subjects of suffrage, property possession, marriage and women’s biological “nature” were the topics of many of these debates. The prevailing contemporary view was based on both tradition and science, each often supporting the other. Traditionally, women were understood to be caregivers and supportive spouses, whether this be to their own families or to their stations. Scientific writings, such as those of the first eugenicist, Francis Galton, confirmed such orthodox views by arguing that women’s rightful place be reproduction and motherhood.¹ Barred from higher education, contained within gender roles based upon theories of complementarity, relegated to raising children and constrained to the home, women were forced to make louder demands for better rights. By the 1880s and ’90s, women were writing essays and novels that appeared in print, entreating a rethinking of what would eventually be called “the woman question.”

In her 1894 essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” Sarah Grand coined the phrase “New Woman,” a figure whom many progressive women used to distinguish themselves from those women who clung to tradition. “New Woman” quickly became a catchphrase for pundits and suffragettes alike. The New Woman made such demands as the right to vote, the right to divorce, to have careers or merely a “latchkey, a symbol of their ability to move freely outside the protection of family and home” (Nelson xi). Though the image of the knickerbockers-clad bicyclist became the

¹ See Francis Galton’s “Hereditary Talent and Character,” *Macmillan Magazine* XII (1865), 157. Excerpted from Galia Benziman’s “Challenging the Biological: The Fantasy of Male Birth as a Nineteenth-century Narrative of Ethical Failure.” *Women’s Studies* 35.4 (2006): 375–395.

boilerplate icon, the New Woman read both literary novels and also political periodicals. She became the subject of satirical rhymes and comics, appearing in publications like *Punch*, but she also contributed answers or commentary to the woman question. Although they were debarred from formal education, many New Women educated themselves, including in many of the sciences (Fawcett 126). As Londa Schiebinger has noted, by the end of the 18th century, botany had become “fashionable” and “appropriate for women’s leisure hours” (*Nature’s* 29, 37). Similarly, these New Women utilized scientific reasoning, drawn from Darwin, in their political discussions.²

Science in its various forms influenced many upper class people to the extent that several cultivated gardens or collected specimens or old curios—archaeological trinkets, dissected insects or fossilized bones. In a word, science was “popular” (Schiebinger 3). Its popularity can likewise be seen from the fact that the first “scientific romances” were published in the 1800s (James 27–8). Beginning with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in the ’20s, through Jules Verne’s novels in the ’70s, and culminating H.G. Wells’ romances in the ’90s, science fiction had come to a definite fruition in fin-de-siècle Britain—though the term “science fiction” would not appear until the 1920s (28). Science fiction, itself, is a difficult genre to define, as many have argued.³ Indeed, attempts to define the genre retroactively often become bogged down in taxonomic rules that need continual tweaking. They can also be presentist. What we, as scholars,

² One woman, H.E. Harvey, writing in *The Westminster Review* in 1897 and explicitly drawing from Darwinian findings and logic, claims, “I think anyone who looks at social questions from a scientific point of view will admit that the only right which we really recognize is the right of the strongest.” See H.E. Harvey’s “Science and the Rights of Women.” Aug. 1897. *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001. 168. Recognizing existing power regimes, Harvey’s observation demonstrates that science informed not merely specialized branches of knowledge but also some women’s quotidian lexicons.

³ For example, see Phillip Wegner’s *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. pp. 4–10.

must do, then, is accept that science fiction, rather than being contained within a specific epoch, utilizes a constellation of conventions in order to disguise its “message.” As David Seed writes in *Anticipations*, a collected set of essays about science fiction in the 19th century, “Science fiction is deeply embedded in the historical processes of technological and political change” (xv). Seed suggests, as do others in this collection, that science fiction takes place in an altered space or an altered time—two of the most important distinctions in most science fiction. With this tripartite definition of space, time and techno-political change, I offer one story for closer inspection: H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896).

The Island of Doctor Moreau has often been included within the genre of science fiction, notably in Darko Suvin’s *Victorian Science Fiction in the UK*. It has also been viewed as a Gothic text. Again, the taxonomies fail for legitimating what fits where, yet I do want to acknowledge (and will return to) *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’s Gothic quality. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* also concerns the two subjects I have touched on thus far: popular science and the New Woman. Reflecting contemporary discussions in the political and scientific communities, relating to the gendering of taxonomies and medical practices as well as the arguments over the woman question, Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, steeped in popular science, portrays a fin-de-siècle reaction to the changing geography of women’s rights vis-à-vis the New Woman.

Wells’ text utilizes science fiction to offer political ripostes to the woman question debate. The text implicitly argues for the consequences of a continued stasis of women’s rights and also demonstrates the anxiety produced by a politically empowered New Woman, which might disrupt the contemporary and masculine order. The novella

too suggests that a change in the rights of women will occur—however much enfranchised men may detest it.

Since the text is relatively short, I would like to refresh readers as to the plot of the story. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* opens with a prologue written by the nephew of the protagonist, who situates his uncle's story, geographically and historically (space and time, respectively). We then meet the protagonist, Edward Prendick, aboard a lifeboat after his ship, the *Lady Vain*, has sunk off of the west coast of South America. After being afloat for ten days, Prendick is taken aboard a passing ship, the *Ipecacuanha*, and is told by Dr. Montgomery that they are delivering a menagerie of exotic animals to an unnamed island. Prendick also meets Montgomery's assistant, a humanoid figure named M'ling, for whom Prendick feels immediate revulsion.

When they arrive at the island, Montgomery introduces Prendick to a strange, white-clad man who offers him a room in his camp. Barred from the interior of the camp from where an awful and pained howling commences, Prendick finally places the man in white: he is Dr. Moreau, an ostracized vivisectionist who fled England. Driven into the jungle by the shrieks, Prendick discovers creatures that resemble a hybrid human-animal form. Prendick returns to the camp, begging for information about the creatures from a reluctant Montgomery. The next morning, noticing the latch has been left unlocked, Prendick treads into the central most part of the camp and discovers Moreau operating on another human-like creature. Suspecting that Moreau now vivisects humans, and fearing that he will be next, Prendick escapes into the jungle only to be subsequently hunted by Moreau. After much coaxing from Moreau, Prendick meets the doctor back in his camp's enclosure to discuss what he has seen.

In a longer chapter of the novella, Moreau explains that he cares only for discovery in creating humans from animals. Prendick accepts Moreau's position and enterprise as normal. Eventually, the Leopard Man, one of the Beast Folk, eats flesh—a law expressly forbidden by both Moreau, whom the Beast Folk have deified, and the “Sayer of the Law,” one of Moreau's creatures. The Leopard Man must thus return to Moreau's table in the “House of Pain.” However, feeling pity for the creature, Prendick shoots the Leopard Man, infuriating Moreau. Weeks pass and one morning, suddenly, the puma whom Moreau has arduously been vivisecting—the same figure Prendick first discovered—breaks free, fleeing into the woods. Moreau and Montgomery chase after her. She is the only prominent female figure in the novella.

Montgomery is found dead in front of the enclosure, as are Moreau and the puma in the jungle, the two apparently having mortally wounded each other. Prendick remains on the island for a span of ten months, alone with the creatures. In this time, he sees many of the Beast Folk revert back to their animal nature; he also fashions a makeshift raft. He leaves the island and is rescued by a passing ship. He tries to relate his experiences, but the crew assumes he is mad. Once back in England, Prendick fears the people in London are actually the Beast Folk and moves into the country to live out the rest of his life.

Although *The Island of Doctor Moreau* can be read as advancing charges of feminine animality and women's unrestrained sexuality, or that animals and women share a closer connection than do men to either, these interpretations fail to incorporate both an understanding of science fiction and the historical context of the woman question. Thus, my project offers an analysis of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as science

fiction, as reflecting contemporary popular science, and as commentary on the woman question and the New Women. In chapter two, I examine the more recent scholarship on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Most of the recent criticism has failed to deal with these books as science fiction texts—or, if they do so, they do so only in a cursory manner—I also provide a discussion of the importance as to why the label “science fiction” is important. In the third chapter, I address directly *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, as it relates to the gendering of science and medicine. Since the 18th century, science categorically eliminated women both as practitioners and from its intellectual aims (Schiebinger 3). However, in this period its object of study became ever more feminine. Due to the conspicuous absence of any *human* female characters, I argue, as have others, that a “feminine” element surfaces in the guise of the puma. However, to this thesis I add that that the feminine’s resurgence extends to the geography of the island as well as the language used to describe the island’s primitive “nature.” Embedded within Wells’ prose, we can perceive aspects of a gendered system of cataloguing the natural world. The very act of going into the woods and collecting and recording specimens takes a gendered form: a female object in the hands of a male scientist. Furthermore, the text exemplifies the gendering of women and nature that characterized much of the contemporary debate over the New Woman. The puma, read as the New Woman, breaks free from the manacles of Moreau’s workshop of pain and meets her detractor on a level ground. She refuses to remain shackled to the socio-scientific hypotheses.

Wells’ story installs the feminine as a force disrupting the seemingly controlled laboratory island of Dr. Moreau. It also participates in the feminizing of the scientific

object, and expresses men's fear of the havoc that would be unleashed by an enfranchised New Woman. Therefore, in the fourth and final chapter, I conclude by looking to Wells' own political standing vis-à-vis the women's movement. By understanding the relationship between the New Woman and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, we can better see English men's anxieties manifesting in contemporary popular science of Wells' story and the anti-women's rights movement.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE SCHOLARSHIP AND THE VALUE OF A SCIENCE FICTION PERSPECTIVE

The Island of Doctor Moreau's popularity has remained strong enough to garner three film adaptations and numerous literary discussions. However, compared to H.G. Wells' other early tales, it receives less attention, and due to its seemingly amorphousness, critics like Roger Bozzetto and Mason Harris decry its kaleidoscopic value for scholars and readers alike to intuit numerous facets of the story.¹ Others have approached the text from a postcolonial perspective, tracing out the implicit racialization in the novella. Timothy Christensen, for example, insists that Moreau's "Law" in the story becomes a performative act, valorized by "race" as a structuring mechanism.² Other critics offer a psychoanalytic analysis, reducing the jungle to a monstrous feminine that engulfs the white male protagonists, somewhat akin Elaine Showalter's essay "The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells" to which I will return shortly. Roger Bowen identifies mythic qualities of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, postulating it as an updated Circe myth. Gorman Beauchamp reads it as autobiography, relating it to Wells' childhood view of God. Beauchamp also identifies an argument about the "natural" character of man and the "artificial" aspect humans create in society.³ Sherryl Vint reads the text as an animal rights tale, one which connects to current discussions of the

¹ See Roger Bozzetto, R. M. P. and Russell Taylor's "Moreau's Tragi-Farcical Island." *Science Fiction Studies* 20.1 (Mar 1993): 34. See also Mason Harris' "Vivisection, the Culture of Science, and Intellectual Uncertainty in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*." *Gothic Studies* 4.2 (2002): 99. These two articles claim, as well as cite other authors' claims, that *The Island of Doctor Moreau*'s "message" or aim remains difficult to decipher.

² See Timothy Christensen's "The 'Bestial Mark of Race in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*." *Criticism* 46.4 (Fall 2004): 575–595.

³ See Roger Bowen's "Science, Myth, and Fiction in H. G. Wells's *Island of Dr. Moreau*." *Studies in the Novel* 8.3 (Fall 1976): 318–335. See also Gorman Beauchamp's "*The Island of Dr. Moreau* as Theological Grotesque." *Papers on Language and Literature* 15.4 (Fall 1979): 408–17.

issue.⁴ Still others argue for its Gothic credentials, situating it in the long line of 19th-century male birth tales.

Often, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* fits into critics' essays as a small example subordinated to their larger focus on another text. Steven Lehman provides a psychoanalytic reading that focuses on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* addressed momentarily in an addendum. Because Shelley lost her own child shortly after giving birth, like her mother who died soon after Mary was born, Lehman perceives Shelley's motivation writing *Frankenstein* as growing out of an inability to procreate and incorporates male womb envy into the text's purport. He asserts, "[I]t addresses the narcissistic injury suffered by a young male regarding his incapacity for childbirth" (50). *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is treated merely as an 1890s echo to male womb envy.

Whereas many critics, like Lehman, avoid any discussion of women or plunge it in larger defenses of masculinity, others like Galia Benziman, Coral Lansbury and Elaine Showalter deals more directly with what might be called the "feminist" issues of the text. Benziman offers an interpretation that closely resembles Lehman's; however, Benziman's methodology is arguably different. Employing the historical framework of the rise of gynecology, as well as historicizing three texts in the Gothic tradition (*Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*), Benziman argues for a feminization of these tales' vision of science. Because Drs. Frankenstein, Jekyll and Moreau aim to re-produce a child without the help of a woman, their tasks necessitate a constant trial-and-error method of operation, thereby

⁴ See Sherryl Vint's "Animals and Animality from the Island of Moreau to the Uplift Universe." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37.2. (July 2007): 85–102.

resulting in a self-reflexive definition of themselves. Benziman enumerates the latency of the self-reflexivity in the earlier 19th-century stories and its increased emergence in the century's later tales. Again, however, Benziman aligns his reading with both Gothic conventions and a male-centered interpretation.

Coral Lansbury, in her book *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England*, links the vivisected animal, the working class, and feminists of fin-de-siècle Britain together as an oppressed group under the aegis of imperial-minded Englishmen. She devotes a chapter to fictions of vivisection, including *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. “[P]rogression from cruelty to animals to the murder of women was consistently used as a theme by male novelists,” Lansbury maintains, and she views the puma in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a conflation of the worker, feminist and vivisected animal, who all refuse to submit (143). Showalter, too, apprehends the puma as the New Woman. Her essay illuminates *The Island of Doctor Moreau*'s Gothic milieu and continues a psychoanalytic approach. She provides a cursory analysis of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, primarily making use of its cannibalistic and human experimentation taboos, while simultaneously arguing, as others have done, that it exemplifies the “imperial gothic.”⁵

Much of my reading of the puma as the New Woman has been touched upon by critics like Lansbury and Showalter. However, they do not treat this as one of the main foci of their argument, often giving it only a paragraph or two. Likewise, most of them approach *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a Gothic text. Mason Harris agrees with

⁵ As others have done, Showalter quotes Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

David Punter's assessment of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a typical Gothic text

(Harris 99; Punter 13). Punter defines the Gothic in this way:

In the first place, it seems to me impossible to make much sense out of Gothic fiction without continual recourse to the concept of paranoia.... Second, Gothic...is intimately to do with the notion of the barbaric. This emerges in a number of forms: as fear of the past...as fear of the aristocracy...as fear of racial degeneracy...and more recently as fear of the barbaric...in the future.... And third, I have tried throughout to draw attention to the very wide-ranging concern among Gothic writers with the nature of taboo. (183–4)

Punter's definition of the Gothic seems more in line with science fiction than one might first believe. Indeed, Brian Aldiss writes, "Science fiction is the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (Science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode" (qtd. in Seed ix). Thus, we can observe a crisscrossing of genre lines such that where Punter sees Gothic, Aldiss finds science fiction.

What seems more relevant though to point out is that Punter, beginning with the very title of his book, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, vastly expands the Gothic timeline. He does not distinguish the Victorian Gothic from what might be called a post-Victorian Gothic. For others, the latter is in fact science fiction. In regard to his second criterion of "Gothic," Punter determines, "Time and time again, those writers who are referred to as Gothic turn out to be those who bring us up against the boundaries of the civilized, who demonstrate to us the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes, who place, over against the conventional world, a different sphere in which these codes operate at best in distorted forms" (183–4). This type of definition often also fits science fiction. David Seed,

paraphrasing Brian Nellist, concludes, “Science fiction repeatedly looks forward so as to look back” (xiii). Again, we find ourselves entrenched in a genre battle.

I emphasize science fiction over the Gothic for an important reason. If we read *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a text about a white man on an island in the Pacific or about the barbarism of vivisection, we can certainly make the argument that many have made regarding its postcolonial attributes or psychosocial taboos. Yet what these interpretations fail to bring to bear is the emphasis Wells places on its contemporary setting. In this context, vivisection is closely related to 1890s feminism, and, therefore, feminism is by that very fact implicated. Science fiction thus offers a fuller understanding of the story’s external rhetorical situation, something that some critics have yet to grasp. The manner in which we can apprehend this claim is through the definition of science fiction as involving distortions in time and space that herald socio-scientific change.

Though some have suggested this text is a science fiction, they have neither answered why nor substantiated the reason for their choice. I conjecture that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* fits within Fredric Jameson’s schema of science fiction, a schema that adds breadth to the descriptions that Aldiss, Seed and others have already provided. Specifically concerning the narrative form, Jameson asserts,

Yet such narrative categories [i.e., constituent parts of the narrative form] are themselves fraught with contradiction: in order for narrative to project some closure (a narrative must have an ending, even if it is ingeniously organized around the structural repression of endings as such). At the same time, however, closure or the narrative ending is the mark of that boundary or limit beyond which thought cannot go. The merit of SF is to dramatize this contradiction on the level of plot itself, since the vision of future history cannot know any punctual ending of this kind, at the same time that its novelistic expression demands some such ending. (283)

The Island of Doctor Moreau adheres nicely to Jameson’s description, as it perplexes a normal narrative arc in more ways than one.

The Island of Doctor Moreau opens with narrative confusion. This book is written from the point of view of the main character, Edward Prendick; yet Prendick does not initiate the story. The first section, entitled "Introduction," is a frame narrative and written by Prendick's nephew. The two authorial voices force the reader to grapple with a grafted text: a characteristic that equally epitomizes Moreau's experiments. The nephew writes, "The following narrative was found among his papers by the undersigned, his nephew and heir, but unaccompanied by any definite request for publication" (Wells, *Making* 174). That the nephew publishes his uncle's story without the "definite request for publication" suggests that Prendick did not want to be around when his story became public. I will return to this issue shortly. Immediately at the outset, however, the reader is confronted with the author, the narrator and the "editor," and their diverse intentions.

The Island of Doctor Moreau takes the form of a flashback by the protagonist. This flashback colors the entire story, making it a doubly framed narrative. Often jarring the reader out of the "present" of the story, Prendick offers prefatory comments to the action, annotations to the events, and endnotes on what has just happened. Thus, we confront a story constantly in revision, inaugurated by three competing storylines, the nephew's and the uncle's past and present. Readers also learn from the nephew's prologue that a ship recently visited the island, finding no trace of what Prendick claims. The entirety of the story, then, occurs outside historical time and before the chronological time of its composition. It also occurs in a place that retains no verifiable evidence of the narrative.

Oddly enough, this is what Prendick fears: that he will get his story wrong, that he will leave out some salient detail that leaves his reader confused or prone to discount his story. Clarity is essential to the telling of this tale, for when he is rescued and relates his story of the disturbing island, his rescuers suspect he might be insane: “Neither the captain nor the mate would believe my story, judging that solitude and danger had made me mad; and fearing their opinion might be that of others, I refrained from telling my adventure further” (102). Therefore, when Prendick later recounts his time spent on the island he wants to tell the truth soberly and anonymously so as to avoid any unwanted scrutiny.⁶

What we find within the story’s form is the evidence of an unstable storyline. In their attempts to create an account that is both legitimate and coherent—one that could serve as a scientific treatise or reliable account of the facts—they actually call more attention to the nature of its constructedness. The aim for supreme order, characteristic of a scientific mode, falls flat, thereby revealing the various parts that constitute the story.

Indeed, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’s constructedness lends it more to Jameson’s designation. He writes, “this ultimate ‘text’ or object of study...is a *construct*: it exists nowhere in ‘empirical’ form, and therefore must be re-constructed on the basis of empirical ‘texts’ of all sorts” (original emphasis, 283). Because there can be no master narrative suggests that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is science fiction.

Moreover, if we reflect back to Seed’s definition, the distortions of time and space are

⁶ This is another characteristic of science fiction according to Patrick Parrinder: “A catastrophe is an occurrence of such magnitude that it can only be confirmed retrospectively. It needs an audience, or at least a sole surviving interpreter” (61). See Patrick Parrinder, “From Mary Shelley to *The War of the Worlds*: The Thames Valley Catastrophe.” *Anticipations*. Ed. David Seed. Liverpool: Syracuse University Press, 1995. 58–74.

also in play in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Jameson reiterates the third condition of the time, space and techno-political triangle that Seed recommended: the different political environment that the defamiliarization assumes via its play with technologies (also in the sense of “techne”). Jameson writes, “SF has concealed another, far more complex temporal structure: not to give us ‘images’ of the future...but rather to defamiliarize and restructure out experience of our own *present*, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization” (286). As I will argue, the New Woman is the tenor to the Moreau vehicle; yet the debates surrounding the woman question are not obvious in the text. It is thus my intention to clarify the ambiguities of the text, working within the “one difference” between science fiction and Realism: “that the full ‘presence’—the settings and actions to be ‘rendered’—are the merely possible and conceivable ones of a near or far future” (286). Thus, it is Jameson’s definition of science fiction that makes clear a fuller reading of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in regard to its feminist issues—an understanding of it as Gothic does not afford.

CHAPTER 3 THE NEW WOMAN IN *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU*

H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is part Victorian adventure novel, part dystopian prophecy, part scientific discourse, part satire, part Gothic, part science fiction, and a host of others. As a text, it resists easy taxonomic work, and as with its crisscrossing of genres, the multitudinous aims of Wells in writing this "rather painful" text seem to diverge in several, unclear ways (Wells qtd. in Bozzetto 34). One thing, however, is certainly evident: Wells' desire "to express [his] vision of the aimless torture in creation" (Wells, *Seven* ix).

The painful quality that Wells implicates is torture. The book is a harrowing tale of an array of tortures, including loneliness, vivisection, psychological agony, and other violences. Indeed, Wells warned his readers that they should not begin to read his works with *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, pointing to his "youthful blasphemy" in writing it (Bozzetto 34; Wells, *Seven* ix). Wells writes, "the universe projects itself towards me in a hideous grimace. It grimaced that time" (ix). The "universe" that surrounded him was one entrenched in wars of politics and science over the rights of animals and over the rights of women.

The story of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is conspicuous for its lack of women. There is an obvious abundance of animals that appear to be human living in a landscape controlled by white European men that is gendered female. Following in a long line of Gothic literature, inaugurated by the first mad scientist tale of Victor Frankenstein, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* continues a tradition of imagining man's attempt to reproduce without the aid of women. The notion of a womanless birth crept into the hopes of the masculine arena of science early in the 19th century, a

development also contemporaneous to the increasing medicalization of the human body and the gendering of the natural world. Because anything part of or affecting the body was thought to be scientifically controllable, the body, and, especially the feminine body, became a place of intense examination and a locus whereon manly science could stake its dominion. Its aim was to tame it through torture.

Hoping to emulate what they found in nature, while simultaneously trying to eliminate the need for women, scientific thinkers boldly usurped what had until then been thought of as the natural order. With the faith that science could fix any problem found in nature and could rival the natural world in any type of creation, women and animals came be viewed less as *subjects* and more as *objects of study* (Benziman 381). A prominence of women within the scientific community of England or much of continental Europe would not occur until the 20th century. Thus, much of the “medicine” practiced came from a masculine point of view.

This is the backdrop to Well’s story. Like the scientific community of Europe, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* offers a world without any women—*human* women, that is. The only women that populate the nameless island are among Moreau’s hybrid forms that defy classification, mirroring the text’s problematic genre. *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’s rejection of the “feminine” and its substitution of a male-dominated, homosocial order mirrored the ideological push occurring throughout the 18th and 19th century (Schiebinger *Nature*’s 9).

The feminine, I argue, reemerges in at least two places in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*: in the geography of the island and in the catastrophic end of Moreau’s experiment. Because nature and women are linked within the novella’s ideology, the

feminine return comments upon the ideology of science in the 19th century, as well as the contemporary discourse on women's rights. The feminine appears through and with the aid of nature—through the animals upon whom Moreau conducts his horrific experiments, through the geography of the island, and, finally, through a distressing and elusive “something” that Moreau and Prendick simultaneously fear and hate. These are figures for the New Woman, barred from science and education, yet who will not remain content in the domestic sphere.

The choice of the settings along with the attempt at male birth via scientific study further substantiates this reading of the feminized Other. Though scholarship of male birth in relation to Gothic literature has burgeoned in the past few decades, what I would like to offer in this essay also brings an ecofeminist edge and a postcolonial-influenced interpretation to a science fiction text. Rather than limiting an analysis to a feminist-oriented psychoanalytic perspective, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that geography and nature become aligned with the feminine, and thereby revolt against the prevailing view of them as mere objects of manipulation.

Feminine Geography

What seems different about the island is not readily apparent. The reader learns of a white male scientist who experiments upon humanoid creatures on a thinly veiled isle of Galapagos, for the location of the island, following Prendick's descriptions of his ships' routes, is very near Galapagos. In effect, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* functions as a microcosm of British imperialism—with a white European governor and his colonial subjects—but also reenacts the setting of a would-be naturalist going into the wild to record, collect samples, and experiment in the field. Furthermore, even the description of the island's geography offers more than just a landscape. Prendick provides an

ekphrasis of what he sees: coming into “a broad bay flanked on either hand by a low promontory,” Prendick appears in the “embrace” of a large, spread pair of legs (Wells, *Island* 17). He writes, “It was low, and covered with thick vegetation,” he then looks “up to a ridge, perhaps sixty or seventy feet above the sea-level,” and “[h]alf way up [there] was a square enclosure...[t]wo thatched roofs [that] peeped from within this enclosure,” noting only the parts that would refer to female sexuality, namely the vagina and breasts (17).¹

That the man-made structures, the only non-natural blight on the horizon, are the breasts substantiates Londa Schiebinger’s claim regarding the gendering of Linnaean taxonomies, especially those of mammals. Though Carl Linnaeus could have chosen many other characteristics for the class that would become *mammalia*, argues Schiebinger, he selected the breast, the *mamma*, as the definitive mark: “his focus on the breast responded to broader cultural and political trends,” namely, the wet-nursing debates of the late 18th century (53). Schiebinger points out, further, that the term *mammalia* “ties humans to brutes, while a traditionally male characteristic (reason)”—as in man of reason (*Homo sapiens*)—“marks our separateness [from brutes]” (55). Thus, the gendering of science and animals gets refracted into Prendick’s descriptions of the island. The island, a natural environment, comes under the control of a camp, a constructed indicator of the civilizer’s existence. Wells’ island becomes feminine with a peculiarly European mark of science.

¹ I want to acknowledge that my reading of the feminine island is similar to Anne McClintock’s analysis of a map in H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. See McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 1–3.

Elaine Showalter has also suggested that Prendick's description of the island—"Presently the ground gave, rich and oozy, under my feet"—marks it as feminine (Wells, *Island* 46; Showalter 80). Like the previous passage about the thatched roofs, this sentence alludes to an interpretation of the landscape as feminine. The "thick vegetation" of the first passage appears again when Prendick decides to wander into it. He writes, "I strode through the undergrowth that *clothed* the ridge behind the house, scarcely heeding whither I went; passed on through the shadow of a thick cluster of straight-stemmed trees beyond it...descending towards a streamlet that ran through a narrow valley" (emphasis mine, Wells, *Island* 26). This entrance into the vaginal passage of the geography foregrounds the feminization of the island and Prendick's access into the gendered feminine world.

This island soon becomes the focal point of the novella, a place where a mad doctor colonizes his little band of manufactured natives. Roger Bozzetto writes, "*Moreau*...locates itself in the direct line of polemics concerning the right to colonize—and to 'civilize' by force—entire peoples on the pretext of their being (technologically) 'inferior'" (34). What the readers come to discover is a tale that cautions against an imperialist, scientific hegemony that views nature and women as tools for tinkering.

In order for the reading of the island as imperial colony or feminine body to work within a science fiction perspective, one must remember that science fiction defamiliarizes what is commonplace and recasts it in a strange new light (Jameson 286). Thus, the New Woman debate, too, gets embedded into this bizarre isle of horrors. Though the New Woman is not yet in Parliament, the university, hospital or laboratory, she is arising in the environment around the white European men,

Montgomery, Prendick and Moreau. The clearest mark to signal these readings is the feminine body.

That the first image of the island takes the form of the female body, on that foreshadows Moreau's experimentation on another female body instantiates a general focus on female bodies in the geographic environments of the novella. We first apprehend the gesture toward bodies and geography in the introduction when we learn that Prendick sets sail from the port Callao, a "guano port in Peru, near Lima" (Wells, *Making* 174). After the *Lady Vain*, another feminine setting, sinks Prendick is rescued by another ship called *Ipecacuanha*, the name of a drug that induces vomiting. It is this combination of the uncanny, in reference to the threatening, feminine landscape of the island, and the forceful nausea that commences the story, which according to Kelley Hurley makes the reader aware of ulterior meaning (104). Whether it be the faces of the creatures that Prendick cannot describe or the foreboding island itself, there is something else looming just below the surface, waiting to break out.

We learn that Prendick's first ship was named the *Lady Vain*. Though we never see the beginning of his journey, we do get an account of what happened before the encounter with Moreau. Prendick begins, "I do not propose to add anything to what has already been written concerning the loss of the *Lady Vain*. As everyone knows, she collided with a derelict when ten days out from Callao" (Wells, *Island* 1). We learn that the boat on which Prendick was sailing, whose name denotes an ostentatious or arrogant woman, sunk when it hit another boat, one abandoned by its crew. The derelict boat as well as the *Lady Vain* functions here as foreshadowing of the eventual derelict laboratory island of Dr. Moreau and as a symbol of technology gone awry. This

technology viciously hits and sinks the *Lady*, thus quite literally suppressing the female symbol, much like the scientific community in Britain treated women and the feminine more generally. The camp, too, gets destroyed when Prendick later tips over a lantern and sets a fire that razes it to the ground.

Jane Caputi has suggested that there is an ongoing war carried out under patriarchy against feminine symbols or forms (*Goddesses* 315). That *Lady Vain* is the first casualty of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* signals an aggressiveness in the narrative for the feminine. The contempt for women that is seen in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* becomes even more apparent as the story progresses. Cast from the safety of the *Lady Vain*, Prendick is forced into a dinghy with two other men and one flask of water in the endless ocean (Wells, *Island* 1–2). Prendick continues, “The longboat [of the *Lady Vain*], with seven of the crew, was picked up eighteen days after [the sinking]...and the story of their terrible privations has become quite as well known as the far more horrible *Medusa* case” (1). Here, we learn that the conditions of the other lifeboat are comparable to the *Medusa*, a ship whose life raft harbored survivors that eventually resorted to cannibalism. Prendick and his two fellow survivors also contemplate drawing straws to see who will become the cannibalized, something Prendick alludes to when he writes, “The water ended on the fourth day, and we were already thinking strange things and saying them with our eyes” (2). Thus thrown into nature, much like Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*, these men resort to cannibalism or revert to animalistic tendencies.

The backward movement from human to animal also becomes a topic of study for Moreau. When Prendick arrives on the island and even after he leaves, the language he

uses to describe himself casts him as animal. At one point, he falls out of the hammock, which “deposited me upon all-fours on the floor,” and later eats “food [that] contributed to the sense of animal comfort which I experienced” (34). Later when he discovers Moreau’s torture of animals, the inhumane treatment he affords his creatures, a frightened Prendick runs off and is eventually cornered and caught by Moreau: he literally becomes the hunted animal. To evade Moreau, he must hide in the undergrowth of the island and, at one point, suffers injury, “a torn and bleeding ear” (47). Indeed the diction lends Prendick animal qualities, and the plot likewise forces him to scurry through the tropical forest, cutting himself, crawling on all-fours, eventually “[falling] in with these monsters’ [i.e., the victims of Moreau’s experiments] ways” (95). Even later, after he has been saved and is back in England, he remembers, “I too must have undergone strange changes. My clothes hung about me as yellow rags, through whose rents showed the tanned skin. My hair grew long, and became matted together. I am told that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement” (98). Once safely returned to England, he still exhibits animalistic inclinations. This switch to animal only occurs once Prendick goes to the island—a womanless ersatz society. Moreover, the predisposition toward the animal is what Moreau finds difficult to eradicate from his creations. Just as Prendick becomes more animalistic in his motor functions due to his experiences on the island, Moreau equally cannot control all aspects of his experiments. This is especially the case when the feminine attacks.

Mason Harris argues the one of the horrors of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* lies in its connection to the real debates about vivisection in the 1890s. Moreau’s indelible thirst for science and his methods would be an all too common image for Wells’ readers.

Charges of godlessness and sadism characterized the staunchest anti-vivisectionists' criticism. Because "opposition to vivisection was often associated with a religious hostility toward science," many of the critiques contained suggestions of immorality on the part of these male "godless Darwinists...who enjoyed inflicting pain" (Harris 100). The latter included Wells' teacher T.H. Huxley. Sympathy for the animal, sympathy for the subject of medical scrutiny, focused on the amount of pain the object of science had to endure for the scientist to procure his knowledge. Bodily pain then was a motivating factor in forging the anti-vivisectionist movement. Moreover, a majority of anti-vivisectionists were women. As Coral Lansbury has argued in her book *The Old Brown Dog*, these women saw the plight of the vivisected animal as comparable to their own struggle against a male-dominated Britain. Frances Power Cobbe, founder of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, was also a suffragette. Thus, anti-vivisectionists and feminists frequently were one and the same.

Though *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is explicitly about the woes of vivisection, it also participates in discussions of 19th century science and politics, and the lesson that the text teaches is that "[p]atriarchal men, whatever their intentions or pretensions, *cannot* control the process of mutation; and change, or mutation, is, after all, essential to life" (original emphasis, Caputi, *Gossips* 276). Another lesson is that nature becomes gendered in the hands of male scientists. Though these "patriarchal men" attempt to describe nature accurately and objectively, their science becomes unavoidably ideological. They import their prejudices about women into their scientific findings, for they wanted to see, Schiebinger notes, "nature as the guiding light for social reform" (4). But nature and society do not necessarily match up with science's interests.

The New Woman

According to Galia Benziman, “The invention of gynecology at the beginning of the [19th] century led to what historians of medicine sometimes refer to as the medicalization of the female body” (378). The notion of women as objects thus emerged not only from the social or political context but also from the medical one. As objects of study, a larger distance between the female subject and the male scientist opened up. The same manner in which women were relegated to specific places, namely, sequestered in the home, and forced to perform only the chores associated with childrearing and the household, extended to science and medicine. Schiebinger writes, “For the most part, academic study of sexual differences was designed to keep women in their place” (Schiebinger, *Has* 112). In this “experimental medicine,” they were still placed in subordinate positions (Harris 100). The perspective of conquering the woman physically and overcoming nature’s quandaries through science links woman and nature together, especially in the way men of science viewed them.

This power dynamic appears not only in the science of the time but also in political debates over the New Woman. Much like one anti-vivisectionist and feminist’s claim that from a scientific viewpoint one must attest that strength structures social power, Mona Caird’s essay entitled “Marriage,” published in 1888 in a prominent periodical, *The Westminster Review*, participates in the discussion of women’s nature as rendered from the viewpoint of science (Harvey 168). She writes, “There is no social philosophy...which does not lapse into incoherence as soon as it touches the subject of women. The thinker abandons thought-laws which he has obeyed until that fatal moment; he forgets every principle of science previously present to his mind” (186). Caird here identifies what Schiebinger similarly notes almost a hundred years later: “In

many cases, ancient prejudices were merely translated into the language of modern science” (*Nature’s* 38). Modern science became a contributor to the orthodox view that women ought not partake in voting, education or the country’s business in general.

Modern science thus took the project of conquering a feminized nature. Caird, a feminist and an anti-vivisectionist, utilizes a well-known dog metaphor in her essay, linking women and animals together in order to illustrate the illogical stance men have taken toward women’s rights. “We chain up a dog to keep watch over our home,” she insists, “we deny him freedom, and in some cases, alas! even sufficient exercise to keep his limbs supple and his body in health” (186). Caird recasts the woman question, conflated here with the dog’s dilemma, as a question of humanity and decency: “Humane people ask [the dog’s] master: ‘Why do you keep that dog always chained up?’” (187). The logic of Caird derives from her position as woman and anti-vivisectionist and bonds women to nature: she sees both as the inferior target in masculine Britain’s science and politics.

Science also provided another men with another benefit, argues Steven Lehman: “Science,” as a controllable stand-in for the role of (female) spouse, could “provide a vessel for the germination of the future hopes of men without the emotional risks run in relationships with women” (55). Married to science, the scientific thinker could still view his work as something conquerable. We see this theme at work in Well’s depiction of Moreau’s scientific labor.

In one of the most important chapters, entitled “Dr. Moreau Explains,” we learn Moreau’s reasoning as to his experiments. Prendick first remonstrates Moreau for his gruesome actions, making the same arguments that anti-vivisectionists leveled at

scientists. However, Prendick eventually accepts the fact that Moreau's impetus is scientific whimsy but also an insatiable desire to conquer that which plagues him. He says, "So for twenty years altogether—counting nine years in England—I have been going on; and there is still something in everything I do that defeats me, makes me dissatisfied, challenges me to further effort. Sometimes I rise above my level, sometimes I fall below it; but always I fall short of the things I dream" (58). This desire to triumph indicates both a patriarchal and scientific form of domination—something that becomes commensurate in Moreau. Moreau's own portrayal of his work suggests his existence is wholly consumed by it: in fact, it defines him. Thus, defeat in his scientific work is not acceptable. Caputi argues, "because the feminine represents a fundamental threat to the success of a male's individuation, masculine subjects seek to control and dominate the feminine, resulting in rape and other forms of abuse" (*Goddesses* 184). Moreau cannot give up, for if he does he loses his superiority as a man and a scientist.

Moreau's relentlessness is indicative of his masculine and scientific endeavor, one that cannot endure loss. As Caputi notes, "rape" and "abuse"—both forms of torture—are one manner in which patriarchy dominates the feminine. They are likewise the avenues for Moreau in his work. The language he uses to describe his project leaves little room for anything but a view of him as a Dr. Death or cruel God:²

"Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say, 'This time I will burn out all the animal; this time I will make a rational creature of my own!' After all, what is ten years? Men have been a hundred thousand in the making." He thought darkly. "But I am drawing near the fastness. This puma of mine..." After a silence, "And they revert. As soon as my hand is

² For an in-depth look at Moreau as a Dr. Death figure, see Elana Gomel's "From Dr. Moreau to Dr. Mengele: The Biological Sublime." *Poetics Today* 21 (Summer 2000): 393–421. For an interpretation of Moreau as God, see Gorman Beauchamp's "*The Island of Dr. Moreau* as Theological Grotesque."

taken from them the beast begins to creep back, begins to assert itself again.” (Wells, *Island* 59)

The violence Moreau commits against these animals necessitates the eventual backlash of the feminine that occurs when the puma breaks free. Though there are “more than sixty of these strange creations of Moreau’s art” on the island, they comprise the inferior end of a power dynamic between themselves and Moreau (61–2). In effect, they stand as the feminine pole of the masculine scientific power spectrum.

Similar to Schiebinger, Benziman argues that “modern science was traditionally gender-biased; its enlightened, rational methodologies were perceived as masculine, and its object of research—nature—as feminine” (379). Thus, the work that Moreau performs establishes a gendered binarism between himself and his subjects. As he becomes more and more possessed by his failed labors, he comes to view his creations with disgust. Moreau says, “They only sicken me with a sense of failure” (Wells, *Island* 59). The only creature Moreau operates on during Prendick’s stay is the puma, and until the discussion he has with Prendick, the puma remains genderless. However, after Prendick and the reader learn of Moreau’s indifference, the puma becomes gendered—almost unnoticeably. Moreau says, “I have some hope of this puma. I have worked hard at her head and brain—” and trails off (59). This puma functions simultaneously as the creature into which he has poured his greatest efforts and as his greatest sense of failure.

The inimitable factor that he cannot grasp, that which defeats him, is the feminine. Because Moreau is the active pursuer of a new creation and his subjects are the passive objects of his study, each becomes gendered accordingly. His torture, disregard and lack of understanding of the need for the feminine ultimately lead him to his own

demise. Benziman stresses that “[s]ince nature—now challenged by man’s scientific progress—is conceived of as feminine and maternal, to surpass it is also to defeat the female body, especially when conception, pregnancy, and childbirth are at stake” (381). This form of conquest is reminiscent of 19th century science, Benziman argues, and gets reworked in Gothic literary tales of male birth: “This dynamic serves to create narratives of reproduction that are conspicuously motherless, and in which a male, who is also a scientist, overcomes his own biological deficiency...[and] by usurping the maternal role, produces a new creature” (381). The infringement by Moreau on the feminine realm thereby necessitates a return of the repressed feminine by the end of the book’s main action (Lehman 54).

“Then suddenly something happened,” writes Prendick (Wells, *Island* 75). The puma breaks free, “shriek[ing] almost like that of an angry virago” (75). Characterized as an evil shrew and spirit, the now gendered puma, the odious feminine, returns with a vengeance. Her vengeance echoes Caird’s dog metaphor. She writes, “*He* [the dog] has no revenge in his power; he must live and die, and no one knows his wretchedness. But the woman takes her unconscious vengeance, for she enters into the inmost life of society. She can pay back the injury with interest” (original emphasis, 187). The dog, the puma and the New Woman all strike back at Moreau.

Wells probably knew of the oft-used dog metaphor, the same one used in Caird’s essay on marriage in 1888, as well as the metaphor Sarah Grand employed in her essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” in 1894. Grand, echoing Caird, exhorts,

When we hear the “Help! help! help!” of the desolate and the oppressed, and still more when we see the awful dumb despair of those who have lost

even the hope of help, we must respond. This is often inconvenient to man, especially when he has seized upon a defenceless victim whom he would have destroyed had we not come to the rescue and so, because it is inconvenient to be exposed and thwarted, he snarls about the end of all true womanliness, cants on the subject of the Sphere, so that we cannot be stirred into having our sympathies aroused by his victims when they shriek, and with shades over our eyes that we may not see him in his degradation, we shall be afflicted with short hair, coarse skins, unsymmetrical figures, loud voices, tastelessness in dress, and an unattractive appearance and character generally, and then he will not love us any more or marry us. (144–5)

The figure of the “defenceless victim”—the shrieking dog or the puma—hearkens back to the opening of Grand’s essay and one of the labels given to the die-hard suffragettes, “Shrieking Sisterhood” (141). The puma enters the fray as the New Woman, a shrieking sister. Her shrieks of pain align her with the rhetoric deployed against the New Woman. Moreover, the women that refuse to submit are “afflicted” with a slew of horrible traits that are analogous to Moreau’s creatures. They are described as the unattractive, shorthaired monsters whom no one will marry. For example, the only creature Prendick claims he “hated from the beginning” was a “particularly hateful (and evil-smelling)” female (Wells, *Island* 63). He similarly indicates, “the females...had in the earlier days of my stay an instinctive sense of their own repulsive clumsiness, and displayed in consequence a more than human regard for the decencies and decorum of external costume” (64). If a woman resists, she becomes the dejected icon Grand summons—the ugly woman who will have to conceal her monstrosity.³

The descriptions of the puma coalesce with the argot of the women’s movement. Yet the connection becomes even clearer in Prendick’s final portrayal of the puma: “I

³ Ouida, too, engages in the New Woman debate against women’s suffrage and also utilizes some of the animal metaphors that Sarah Grand exercises. See Ouida’s “The New Woman.” May 1894. *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001. 153–160.

threw up my arm to defend myself..." he continues, "and the great monster, swathed in lint and with red-stained bandages fluttering about it, leapt over me and passed" (75–6). The puma clad in bandages and bleeding—a literal mobile wound, an attack on nature and men—runs past Prendick, returning to the natural world from which it originated. Yet what Moreau has done to it in his torture will not allow the puma to be simply released. This puma eventually kills Moreau and causes the death of Montgomery; she also permanently scars Prendick, who will be unable to reassimilate to life in England. Her actions will stand as a lesson to both Prendick and those who read his tale of Moreau's horror of vivisection and scientific dominion.⁴

The Rejected Feminine's Legacy

The action following the puma's escape is all reported to Prendick, who then relates it to his reader. After the puma flees into the jungle, Moreau and Montgomery follow in pursuit. The forest again becomes personified: "[Prendick] stared inland at the green bush that had swallowed up Moreau and Montgomery" (77). The feminine landscape now has the ability to attack, to exact its measure of revenge against Moreau. We learn of gunfire and of Montgomery's fruitless searches for Moreau. What ensues is a chaos that contrasts against the grim order that Moreau tried to create through his science. This chaos should similarly be viewed as feminine. According to Caputi, chaos is related to the feminine, namely, to goddesses such as Kali and Eve (*Gossips* 281). Chaos, as a concept, is often feminized, and is the raw material from which the order of the universe is formed—usually by a male god.

⁴ I want to acknowledge that Coral Lansbury and I both read the puma as the New Woman. However, she does not argue for the gendering of science and nature in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as do I, nor does she accommodate Mona Caird and Sarah Grand's essays. See the *Old Brown Dog*, p. 151.

Within *The Island of Doctor Moreau* the feminine puma brings about new chaos, ultimately leading to the deaths of Moreau, Montgomery and many of the island's creatures. Similarly, in the ten months Prendick remains on the island after Moreau has died, the beasts begin to revert back to their former types. Though the chaos on the island eventually reaches a point of equilibrium, the trauma Prendick endures persists until his death. When once back in England, he writes, "I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another Beast People, animals half wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert" (102). Fearing that everyone is now one of Moreau's beasts, Prendick moves to a quiet country home surrounded by books.

According to Roger Bowen, "The very notion of creation for [*The Island of Doctor Moreau*] is an extension, in light of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory, of that ancient story of a perverter of human souls and an abuser of the human form" (321). *The Island of Doctor Moreau* stands as both a cautionary tale, warning against the horrors of science that promises creation of new organisms, and as a commentary on the debate of the 1890s, including such topics as vivisection and women's rights. Commenting on the "New Women of the fin de siècle and the feminist anti-vivisectionists" as well as "the hubris contained in the belief of many of Wells' contemporaries that the biological and social sciences could eliminate the unknown or the excessive from the calculus of humanity," *The Island of Doctor Moreau* summarizes the worries of science run amok (Showalter 79; Christensen 577). Explicit in the text is the masculine supremacy of logic and science, taking form in Moreau's experiments against nature and animals as well as Prendick's writing of a text. Implicit in the text is

the feminized landscape and nature that eventually returns to wreak disaster against the masculine scientist. H.G. Wells' text thus both posits the problem of masculine science and offers an image of the response from the rejected feminine.

CHAPTER 4

EPILOGUE: THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE AND WELLS' FEMINISM

The political climate of the 1890s in Britain, as we have seen, gets inscribed into the novella's landscape and the figure of the puma. It also functions as a cautionary tale. Though some assert that its caveat belongs to science, I have argued its admonition pertains to the anti-women's movement. According to Mason Harris, who cites an early reviewer of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and friend to Wells, suggests that Wells was pro-vivisection but utilized the anti-vivisectionist standpoint as an effective "source of horror" (100). Indeed, as Harris points out, Wells "makes clear in 'Popular Feeling,' a later essay attacking the anti-vivisectionist movement," that his views on vivisection are grounded in science and the belief that vivisection could provide benefits to humanity (101). In my own reading of the puma and the geography of Moreau's island I do not mean to suggest anything to the contrary of Wells stance on vivisection; however, I have tried to illustrate how *The Island of Doctor Moreau* utilized a popular science idea to forward a critique on behalf of New Women.

Though anti-vivisectionists were often pro-suffrage, the two political positions do not cross in Wells' beliefs. Writing about a decade after *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in *First and Last Things* (1908), Wells writes, "I declare for the conventional equality of women, that is to say for the determination to make neither sex nor any sexual characteristic a standard of superiority or inferiority, for the view that a woman is a person as important and necessary, as much to be consulted, and entitled to as much freedom of action as a man" (*First* 265). Wells' feminism offers the grounds for a pro-women's interpretation of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

It seems futile to suggest that in his attitude toward vivisection Wells was patently anti-science. Instead, Wells' text exploits the vivisectionist debate and the anti-vivisectionist stance for a subtly feminist argument. Brian Stableford professes, "Ambivalent attitudes to science are not particularly unusual in works of speculative fiction. A great deal of the fiction nowadays categorized as science fiction is horrific, and much of it is born of a fear or even a deep-seated hatred of the scientific world-view" (48). *The Island of Doctor Moreau's* employment of a popular perspective—the anger against vivisection—allows for a critique of the anti-women's movement more than vivisection. That Wells' text contributes to criticisms of the anti-women's movement of the 1890s likewise places *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in the line of feminist science fiction that deals with issues of sexism and politics. In this it is similar to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. Therefore, understanding *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as such does two things: it extends early feminist science fiction further into the past, and it also offers a way to understand womanless science fiction as pro-feminist.

The text's feminist message, disguised as the barbaric experiments of mad scientist's quest for pure creation, is dependent upon defamiliarization. Without recognizing the novella as science fiction, a reading of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as pro-feminist would be less than obvious. *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, rather than taking place in England, though an island itself, transpires on an unfamiliar, fictive isle near the Galapagos Islands. In lieu of real women, there is a puma. In place of an authentic society, there is a Beast People fashioned in light of science, complete with a god (Moreau) and laws. Cleverly disguised, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* functions as a science fiction text that nonetheless critiques anti-feminist perspectives.

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Thomas Cole graduated from Little Rock Central High School in 2004. Thereafter, he attended Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee and graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and German in 2008. In 2010, he received his Master of Arts in English and a certificate in women's studies at the University of Florida and will pursue a doctoral degree at the same institution in the fall of the same year.